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ABSTRACT

A total of 572 randomly selected sixth-grade students and 908 randomly selected ninth-grade students from a large metropolitan school district in the Midwest were asked to complete a series of survey questions designed to measure the extent to which they were happy while at school, as well as questions concerning the extent to which they treated their teachers with respect, the extent to which they did their best to learn, the extent to which they treated their classmates with respect, and the extent to which they worked cooperatively with other students. In addition, teachers of 1,912 randomly selected first-, second-, and third-grade students were asked similar questions as they related to each of their students. It was found that, across grade levels, students who perceived themselves to be happy while at school or who were perceived by their teachers to be happy at school were more likely to be described as students who treated their teachers and classmates with respect, who did their best, and who worked cooperatively with other students. (Author/HTH)

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School Happiness and School Success:
An Investigation Across Multiple Grade Levels

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Abstract

A total of 572 randomly selected 6th grade students, and 908 randomly selected 9th grade students from a large metropolitan school district in the Midwest were asked to complete a series of survey questions designed to measure the extent to which they were happy while at school, as well as questions concerning the extent to which they treated their teachers with respect, the extent to which they did their best to learn, the extent to which they treated their classmates with respect, and the extent to which they worked cooperatively with other students. In addition, teachers of 1912 randomly selected 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade students were asked similar questions as they related to each of their students. It was found that, across grade levels, students who perceived themselves to be happy while at school, or who were perceived by their teachers to be happy at school, were more likely to be described as students who treated their teachers and classmates with respect, did their best, and worked cooperatively with other students.

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School Happiness and School Success:
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According to Baker (1999), children's relationships with others are critical in determining their capacity to reach their academic potential. Stated somewhat differently, Wang and Gordon (1994) found that interpersonal factors influence students' academic achievement. Baker (1999) noted, however, that too little attention has been paid to the very important psychosocial outcomes of schooling, e.g., students' affective status or their liking or disliking of school.

Parish (1992) enlarged upon a model proposed by Glasser (1989) and suggested that we all "live" in "five (5) worlds". The first "world" is the "All-There-Is World" which consists of everything that exists. The second world is the "All-I-Know World" which consists of everything we know, whether correct or not. The third "World" is the "All-I-Want World," or "Quality World" which consists of everything we desire or value greatly. These first three "Worlds" were proposed by Glasser (1989). Parish (1992) subsequently added two other "Worlds". They are the "All-I-Don't Want World" that includes any/all things that we really wish to avoid if at all possible, and the "Combination World" which includes approach/avoidance things that we might desire or want for various reasons but also might wish to avoid for various other reasons.

Insert Figure 1 about here.

Parish (1992) noted that kindergarteners usually place school in their "All-I-Want" or "Quality World," but as students progress with their educations, their placement of school often migrates into their "Combination World," and for some, into their "All-I-Don't-Want World."

In the present study, students were categorized as high, mid-level, or low in terms of "Happy at School" based on whether they were described as usually or always very happy at school (an "All-I-Want" or "Quality World" item), sometimes happy at school (a "Combination World" item), or seldom or never happy at school (an "All-I-Don't-Want World" item). Sixth and ninth grade students at the 3 levels of "Happy at school" were compared based on their responses to the following four items:

1. I treat my teachers with respect at this school.
2. At this school I do my best to learn about things I need to know to prepare for my future.
3. I work cooperatively with other students at this school.
4. I treat other students at this school in a caring and respectful manner.

First, second, and third grade students at the 3 levels of "Happy at School" were compared based on their teachers' responses to the following four items:

1. This student treats teachers with respect at this school.
2. At this school, this student does his or her best to learn the things presented in class.
3. This student works cooperatively with other students at this school.
4. This student treats other students at this school in a caring and respectful manner.

Method

The present study was conducted in a large Midwestern metropolitan school district. For the 1912 randomly selected students in grades 1, 2, and 3, their teachers were asked to respond on a five point scale (1 being never and 5 being always) whether the teacher perceived the student as happy while at school and then to respond to questions regarding the extent to which the student treats teachers with respect, the extent to which the student does his or her best to learn, the extent to which the student works cooperatively with other students, and the extent to which the student treats other students in a caring and respectful manner.

For the 572 and 908 randomly selected students in grades six and nine, respectively, the students themselves rated their level of happiness or unhappiness and answered the four items listed above.

Results

Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the analysis of variance summary tables for the primary grade students (i.e., grades 1,2, & 3), sixth grade students, and ninth grade students, respectively. Notably, for all four items, across all grade levels, the findings are nearly identical. In fact, as portrayed in Figures 2 to 13, there are uniformly striking significant differences reported for all four items, across all grade levels, and all of these findings significantly favor happy students over the unhappy students. Students who were "Happy at School" were significantly more likely to be perceived as treating teachers with respect, doing their best to learn, working cooperatively with other students, and treating other students in a caring and respectful manner.

Insert Tables 1-3 and Figures 2-13 about here.

Discussion

Oscar Wilde once said that, "If you want to have good children, you must have happy children." The findings reported in the present study also seem to indicate that if you want to have good students…it is imperative that you strive to have happy students. This was found to be so across all four items surveyed, and across all grade levels. Data that are so consistent strongly suggest that finding ways to enhance student happiness at school should be highly underscored by all concerned, especially if one is already concerned about how well students are performing academically or otherwise within a school district.

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Table 1: Comparisons by Happy at School – Combined 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Grades

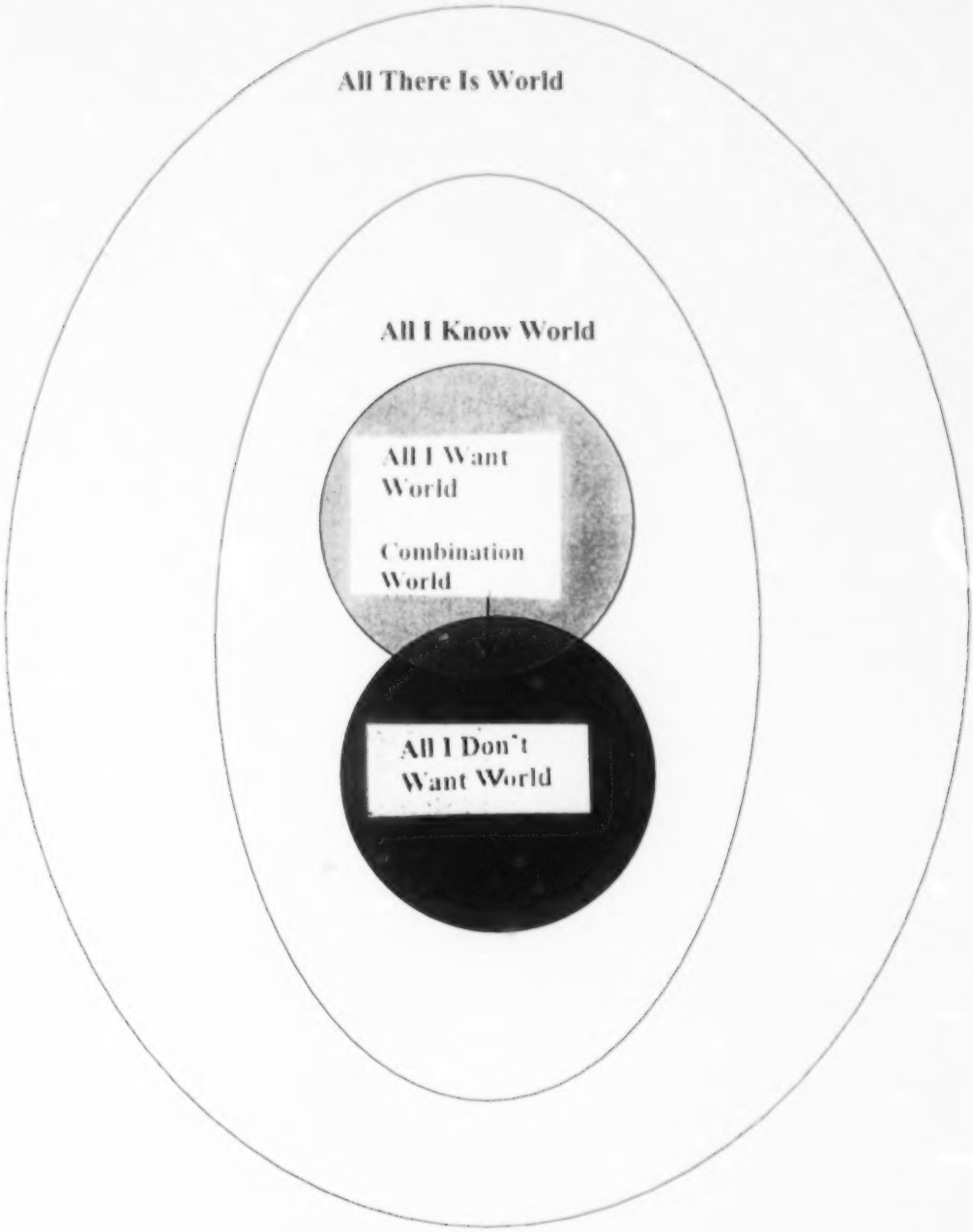
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
This student treats teachers with respect at this school.	Between Groups	369.683	2	184.842	288.346	.000
	Within Groups	1223.746	1909	.641		
	Total	1593.429	1911			
At this school, this student does his or her best to learn the things presented in class.	Between Groups	522.543	2	261.272	272.544	.000
	Within Groups	1828.129	1907	.959		
	Total	2350.673	1909			
This student works cooperatively with other students at this school.	Between Groups	509.018	2	254.509	284.932	.000
	Within Groups	1698.917	1902	.893		
	Total	2207.935	1904			
This student treats other students at this school in a caring and respectful manner.	Between Groups	496.934	2	248.467	288.280	.000
	Within Groups	1641.045	1904	.862		
	Total	2137.979	1906			

Table 2: Comparisons by Happy at School - 6th Grade

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I treat my teachers with respect at this school.	Between Groups	31.068	2	15.534	12.791	.000
	Within Groups	691.051	569	1.215		
	Total	722.119	571			
At this school I do my best to learn about things I need to know to prepare for my future.	Between Groups	94.324	2	47.162	45.493	.000
	Within Groups	583.657	563	1.037		
	Total	677.981	565			
I work cooperatively with other students at this school.	Between Groups	104.228	2	52.114	41.193	.000
	Within Groups	717.323	567	1.265		
	Total	821.551	569			
I treat other students at this school in a caring and respectful manner.	Between Groups	143.766 2	2	71.883	52.720	.000
	Within Groups	768.999	564	1.363		
	Total	912.765	566			

Table 3: Comparisons by Happy at School - 9th Grade

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
I treat my teachers with respect at this school.	Between Groups	145.362	2	72.681	89.998	.000
	Within Groups	730.863	905	.808		
	Total	876.225	907			
At this school I do my best to learn about things I need to know to prepare for my future.	Between Groups	133.565	2	66.782	77.269	.000
	Within Groups	770.943	892	.864		
	Total	904.507	894			
I work cooperatively with other students at this school.	Between Groups	144.941	2	72.471	81.846	.000
	Within Groups	795.132	898	.885		
	Total	940.073	900			
I treat other students at this school in a caring and respectful manner.	Between Groups	135.510	2	67.755	80.248	.000
	Within Groups	757.352	897	.844		
	Total	892.862	899			



Our Five "Worlds"

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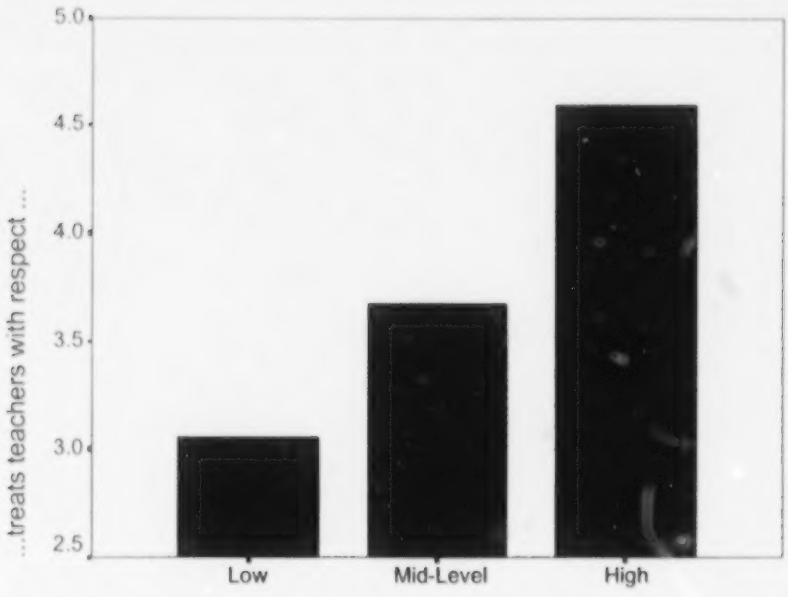

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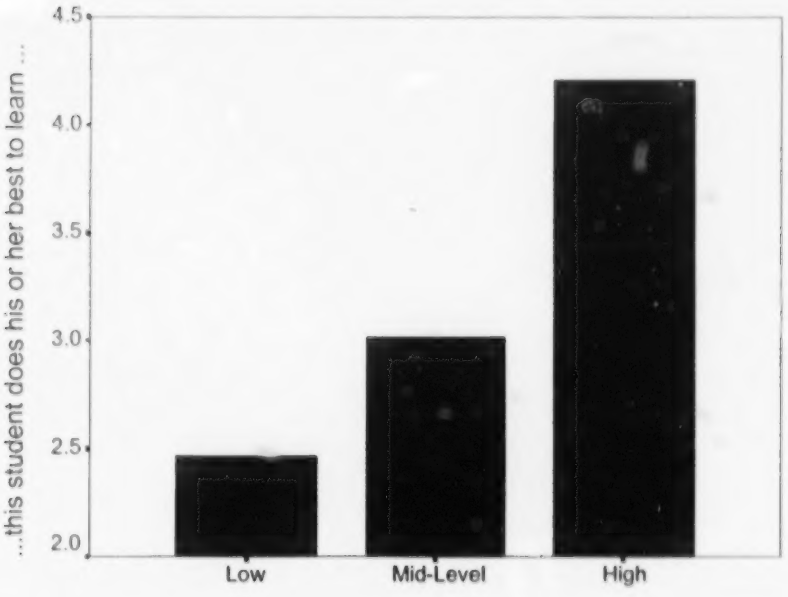

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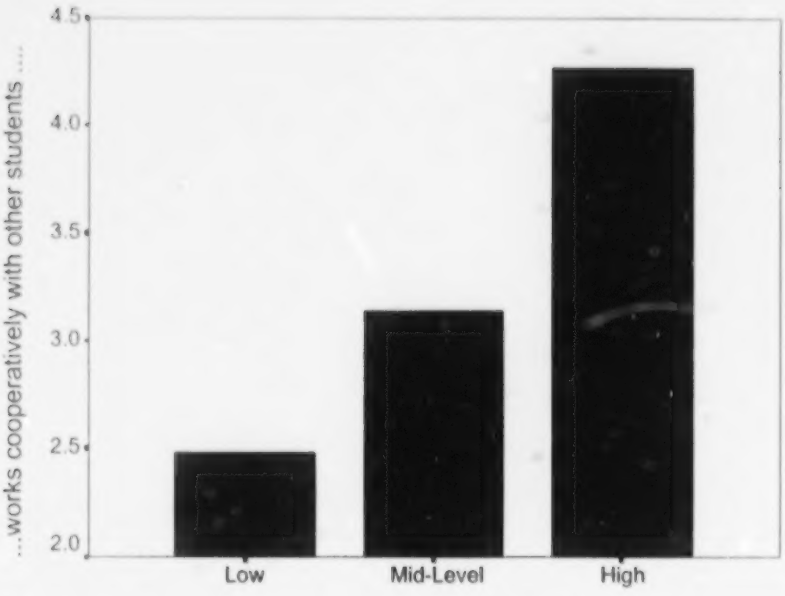

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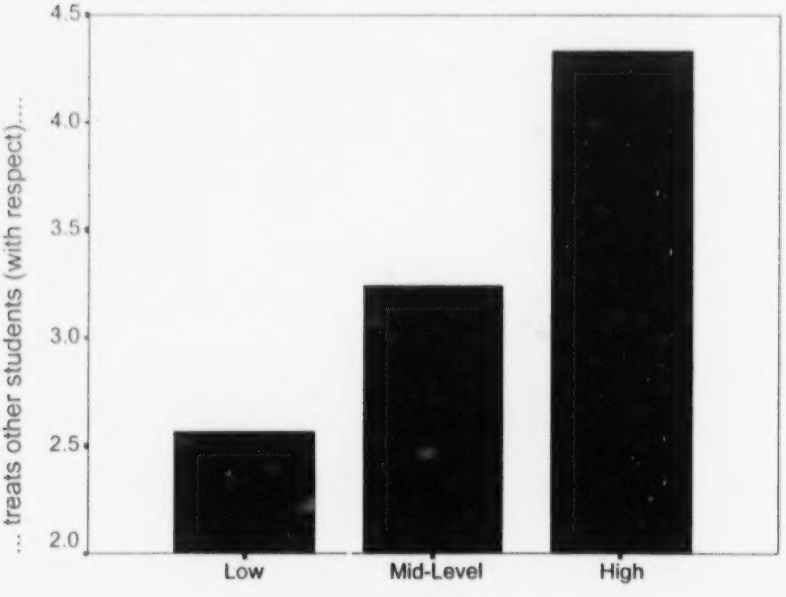

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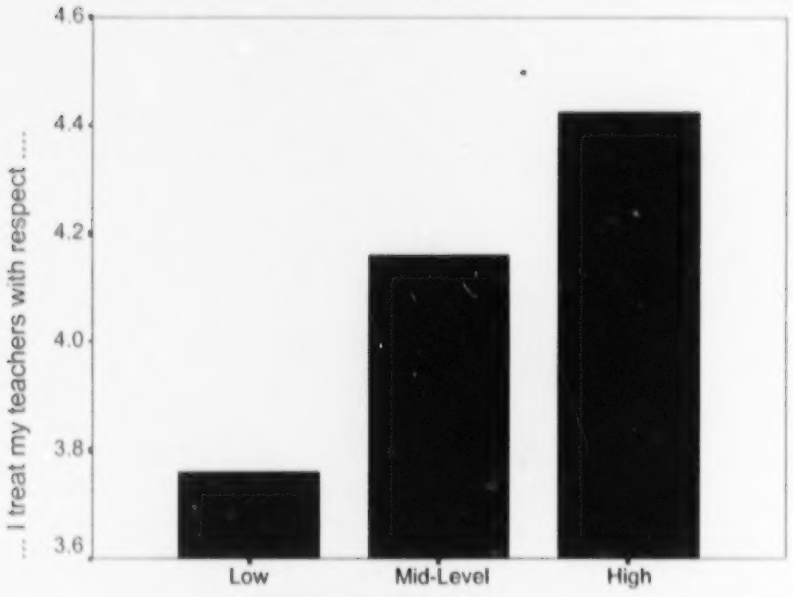

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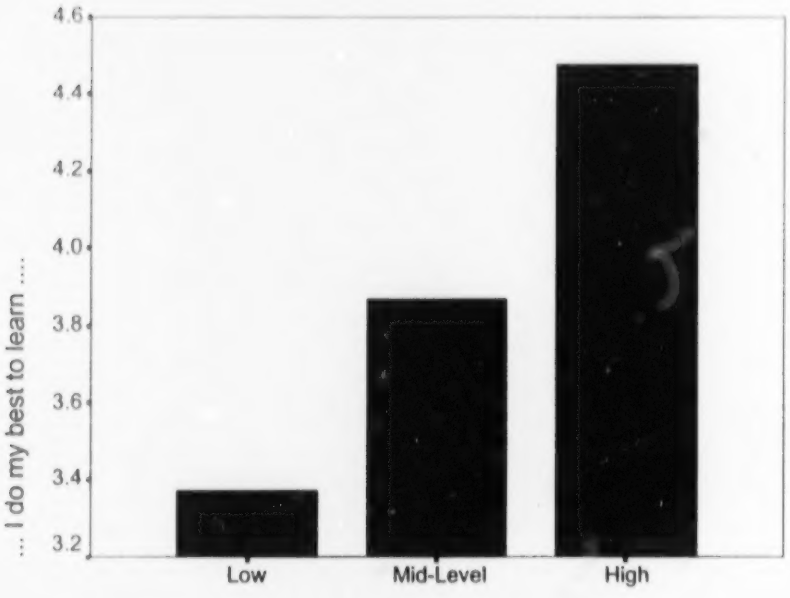

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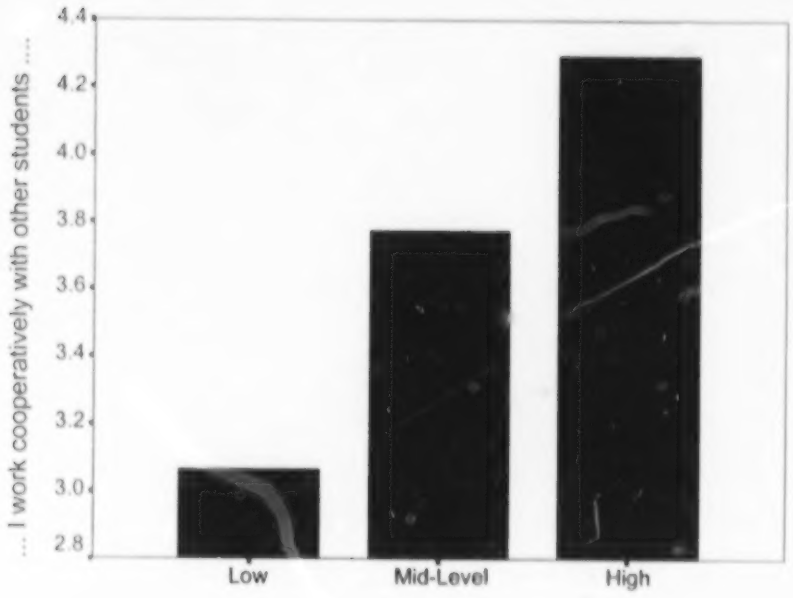

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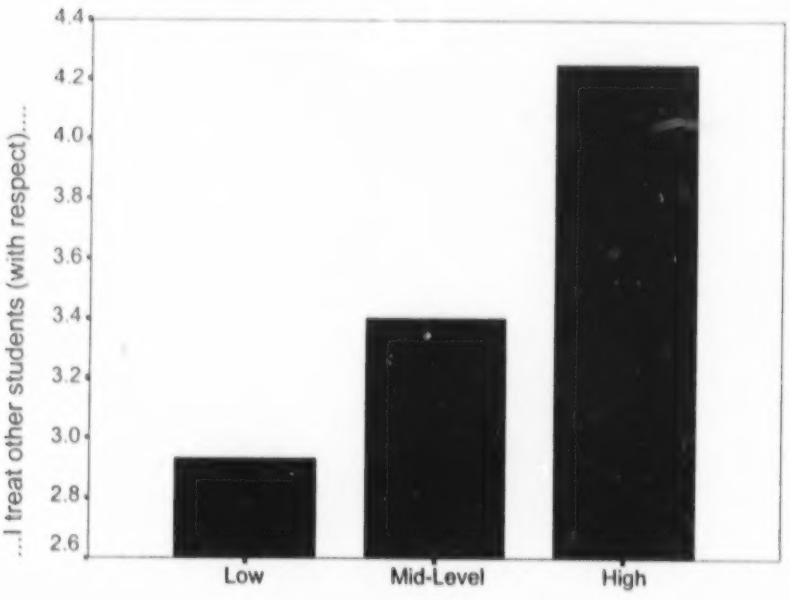

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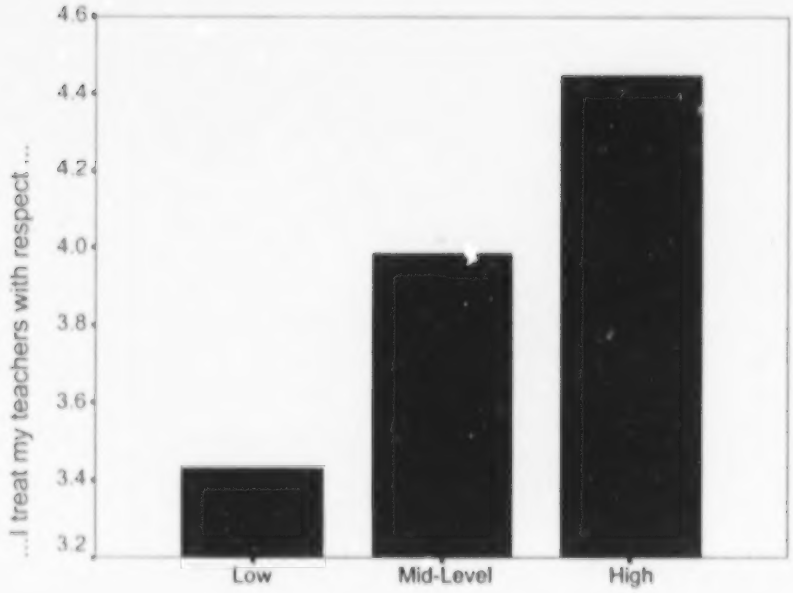

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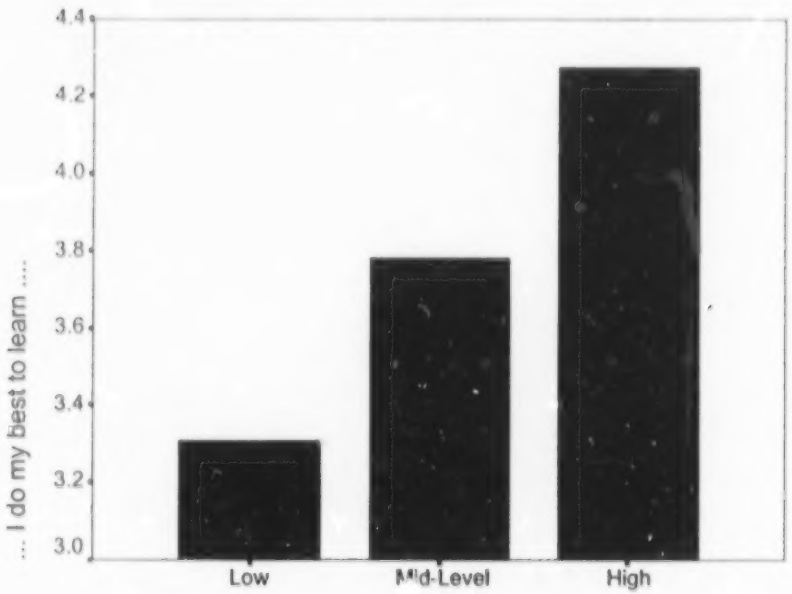

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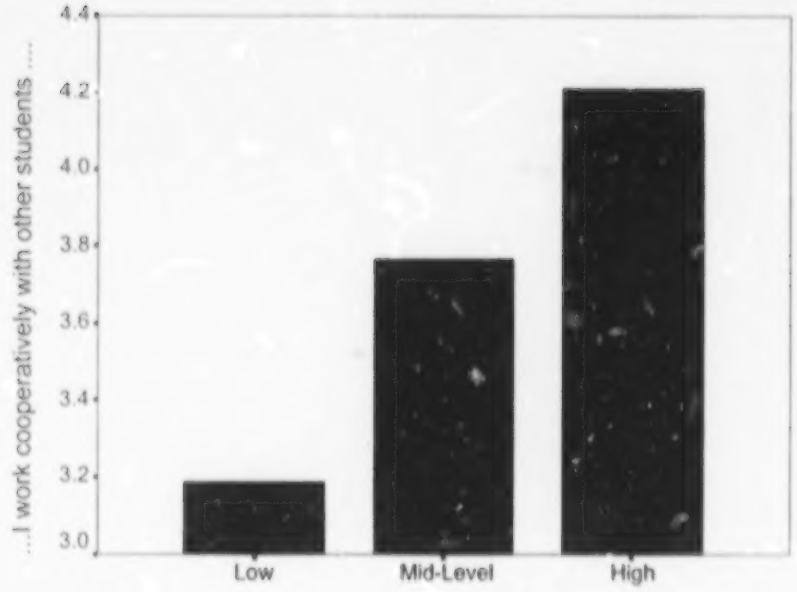

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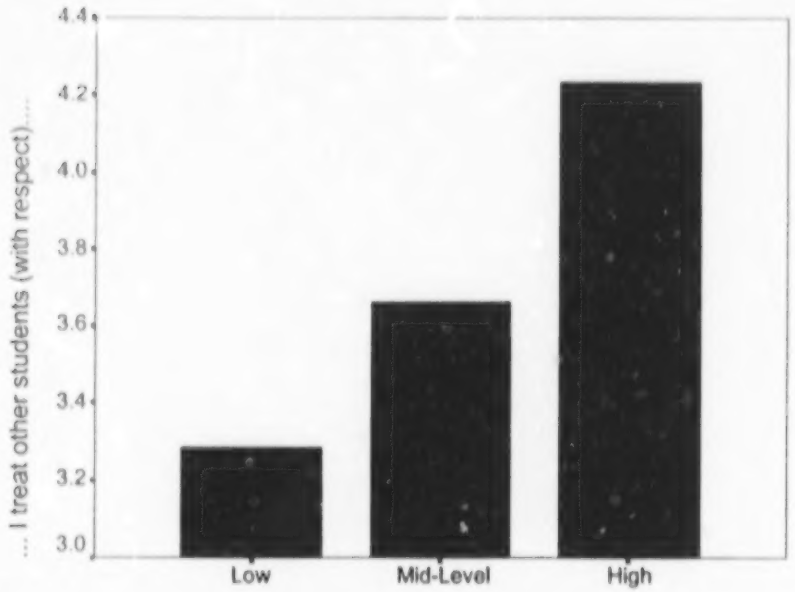

Figure 13